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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: ELECTION DAY
SITREP # 4 AS OF 6:00 PM, JANUARY 25, 2006

REF: A. JERUSALEM 345
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 340
[1](#)C. JERUSALEM 338
[1](#)D. JERUSALEM 00324

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) As of 6:00 pm local time, Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections continued to go smoothly with only sporadic reports of violence. The Central Elections Commission reported voter turnout at 64.7 percent with 810,000 voting in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Slow lines at East Jerusalem Post Offices may be contributing to many going to polling stations outside of the Jerusalem municipality boundaries to vote. There were several reports of altercations between Hamas and Fatah/al-Aqsa supporters in Hebron and the Gaza Strip. Because of unconfirmed reports of a grenade attack at one polling station and a shooting in Gaza City, NDI decided to pull its observers out of Gaza. The NDI Command Post described the atmosphere in Gaza as growing more tense than in the West Bank. Media outlets continued their continuous coverage of the elections. End summary.

64.7 percent Voter
Turnout, as of 6:00 pm

[1](#)2. (C) At 6:00 pm, the Central Elections Commission (CEC) reported voter turnout at 64.7 percent with 810,000 Palestinians having already voted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The CEC has decided to extend the hours of the polling stations until 9 pm. Requests have also been made to the GOI to allow voting to continue until 9 pm in Jerusalem.

Steady Voting Continues in Jerusalem
But Many Likely Going Outside
Because of Long Lines

[1](#)3. (C) Israeli police representatives in the joint police command post reported to the RSO at 5 pm that 2,200 eligible voters had turned out in Jerusalem. Voting was steady at the Salah Ed-din Post Office polling station in East Jerusalem with seven windows open and more than 1400 of 3550 eligible voters having already cast their ballots. Inside the post office when Senator Biden and Consul General observed the voting at 2:00 pm, the atmosphere was calm, with 30 to 35

people in line waiting to vote. The Post Office's security removed one Fatah supporter allegedly trying to tell those in line how to vote, but otherwise Israeli police were not interfering in the process. A small group of 10-15 people were protesting outside the Salah Ed-din Post Office, carrying signs and chanting against the occupation. Fatah supporters were also chanting pro-Fatah slogans. A solitary heckler criticized U.S. policy in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Gharib. In a conversation with PolOff, Mahdi Abdul Hadi, the head of Palestinian NGO Passia, criticized the voting procedures in East Jerusalem as lacking privacy, stating that the postal workers could see who the voters were selecting.

¶4. (C) Voting was somewhat lighter at the Jaffa Gate Post Office in the Old City of Jerusalem, with only 114 of 550 eligible voters having turning out by late afternoon. By 4:15 pm, only observers were at this polling station. At the a-Tur Post Office, 220 out of 550 eligible voters had voted by 4:40 pm. PolOff described that polling station as very quiet though the line was moving slowly with only 24 voting each hour. Given the wait time of more than an hour, many voters had decided to vote outside of the municipal boundaries.

¶5. (C) PolOff reported from the Sur Baher Post Office in southern Jerusalem that well over 300 of the 550 voters eligible to vote there had voted by 5:50 pm, but there, too, he noted that there was a long wait time, so many also could have gone to vote outside of Jerusalem. He commented that Hamas was extremely well-organized in that area and that the Hamas representatives outside of the polling station had a list of Hamas supporters and knew who to expect at the voting station, thereby illustrating the level of commitment of Hamas and their supporters.

Longer Lines in Gaza; Atmosphere
Growing More Tense There

¶6. (C) The NDI command center, according to the ConOff stationed there, is receiving reports of longer voting lines at polling stations in Gaza than in the West Bank and that the Palestinian police are containing those lines. NDI also commented that there was a higher degree of "assisted voting" in Gaza, than in the West Bank. In general, NDI was reporting that since 2 pm, local time, the atmosphere in Gaza is growing more tense, especially from a security perspective.

Sporadic Reports of Violence

¶7. (C) Sporadic reports of violence throughout the West Bank and Gaza have been reported. PD FSNs reported that Arabic-language radio station 98.1 broadcasted a report that a PA security officer was beaten by unidentified individuals outside a polling place in Beit Awua, near Hebron. Fist fights also broke out between Fatah and Hamas supporters inside one Hebron-area polling station in Shyookh, between Hamas and al-Aqsa supporters in Safftay, northern Gaza, and in Bani Suheila, near Khan Younis in Gaza. The RSO also received an unconfirmed report of gunshots near a hospital located in the center of Ramallah. (Note: He also received reports that IDF vehicles were stoned in Rafat, north of Ramallah, but noted that this was likely unrelated to the elections. End note.)

¶8. (C) Still-unconfirmed reports of the grenade attack at a Gaza City polling station and a shooting in Beit Hanoun (reftel A) led NDI, according to the ConOff at NDI's command center, to pull its election observers from polling stations in Gaza to reassess their safety.

¶9. (C) NDI received reports from Canadian observers at the Tariq Bin Ziyad School polling station in Hebron that there was a small riot there that caused the site director to shut the door and lock the two Canadian observers inside. The

station was reopened 20 minutes later, according to RSO sources.

Mustafa Barghouthi predicting
third place for his list

¶10. (C) ConGenOff observers in Beitunia, next to Ramallah, met "Independent Palestine" List leader Mustafa Barghouthi, who told them, "This is a great day. When did you see anything like this in the Arab world?" Barghouthi added that he expected to come in third place, behind Fatah and Hamas. Polling stations workers in the Ramallah area told Econ FSN that Barghouthi was visiting a number of polling stations in the Ramallah area and shaking hands with voters.

Voter Participation Cuts
Across Socio-economic Levels

¶11. (C) ConGenOff observers in Ramallah described a carnival atmosphere in the streets there, with a broad cross-section of the population at the twelve polling stations they visited in Ramallah. They reported seeing a modernly-attired mother with a falafel-juggling tot in tow, silk-scarf wearing businessmen, younger women in the hijab grandmothers in traditional embroidery dresses, laborers with their callused hands bringing in their younger sons to assist them in voting, and an older gentleman sporting the practical combination of an Eddie Bauer windbreaker and a caffia. Elsewhere in Ramallah, Hamas supporters were seen driving a jaunty yellow bulldozer festooned with a large poster of Sheikh Yassin and a startlingly large number of green Hamas flags.

¶12. (C) One voter in Hizma, a poorer village sandwiched between Jerusalem and Ramallah, described election day "like a wedding." The independent candidate for one of the Jerusalem seats, Rajeh Abu Asab, made a dramatic entrance at the Hizma polling station when he drove up in his H3 Hummer, drawing an excited crowd of little boys, off from school for the day because of the elections.

Media Coverage

¶13. (SBU) Al-Jazeera, which has correspondents in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem/Beit Sahour, Hebron, and Gaza/Khan Younis, reported that clashes between Fatah and Hamas supporters erupted at a polling station in northern Hebron. The conflict began when several voters tried to take photos inside voting booths. Twelve people were reportedly injured, however, Palestinian security forces were said to have controlled the situation and restored calm at the station. Al-Jazeera also carried a comment by the election commission chairman, Hanna Nasser, who said that the elections were running smoothly and that no major problems had been reported. Nasser said he expected the number of voters casting ballots to be high.

¶14. (SBU) Meanwhile, al-Arabiya quoted Muhammad Dahlan as saying, "Fatah will respect the Palestinian people's decision regardless of the elections' results." Al-Arabiya also featured a report from Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, where Palestinian refugees expressed regret that they could not vote in the elections. The official PA station, PBC, carried live coverage from Jericho and Gaza, where voting was said to be running smoothly, with no disruptions. Al Hurra and Nile News continued to cover the Palestinian elections with no unusual reports.

WALLES